

the top end cap 102 may comprise a curved surface 102C. Alternatively, the bottom of the top end cap may comprise a flat surface that may or may not be parallel with the top surface of the top end cap. Preferably, the top end cap and the bottom end cap are similarly shaped and interchangeable. Alternatively, the top and bottom end caps 102 and 104 may be different.

5 The central portion 106 may be formed in a tube from a sheet material such as a thin flexible thermoplastic material having a preferred thickness of 0.005 to 0.050". Of course thicker or thinner material may be used depending on the size and/or weight of the container. The central portion 106 preferably is transparent. The central portion 106 may have a cross section similar to the cross section of the end caps 102 and 104. Ends 106A and 106B of the
10 central portion 106 may fit in the groove 102B or 104B in end caps 102 and 104 respectively. The central portion 106 may be positively coupled to the end caps 102 and 104, as will be discussed below. The central portion 106 may be extruded into its final form or may be formed by rolling or creasing a piece of flexible sheet stock into a desired cross section and gluing, welding, mechanically fixing or otherwise securing the ends together. The central portion 106
15 may be formed in any length. A plane formed by the ends 106A and 106B may be perpendicular to the side of the central portion. The ends 106A and 106B alternatively may be other than perpendicular to the sides of the central portion or may have a nonlinear contour.

 The merchandise card 110 may be a rigid planar structure formed of a thermoplastic. Alternatively, the merchandise card may be formed from a metal or any paper product including
20 cardboard. The merchandise card 110 need not be planar, but may have a contour to match the opening 102D/104D in the end caps 102 and 104 respectively. The merchandise card 110 may include stiffening ribs 118. An item 116 to be sold may be secured to the merchandise card 110

by plastic or metal ties or string 114 that extend through openings 112 in the merchandise card 110, or could be affixed to the card by glue or shrink wrap, etc. The merchandise card 110 may further comprise protrusions 120 and 122 to assist in the securing of the item 116.

Alternatively, the merchandise card 110 may further comprise indentations in which the item 116 is set. The merchandise card 110 may comprise ends 108 that may be inserted in openings 102D and 104D respectively in the end caps 102 and 104 respectively. The opening 102D and 104D may be shaped to frictionally engage the ends 108 of the merchandise card 110. When the end caps 102/104 are secured to the central portion 106, the merchandise card 110 may extend from the bottom end cap 104 to the top end cap 102. Alternatively, the merchandise card 110 may be secured in place only by the lower end cap 104.

As shown in FIGS. 2 and 3, the opening 102D may be located along the centerline of the end cap 102. Alternatively, an opening 102D' may be offset from the centerline of the end cap.

FIG. 4 shows a second embodiment container 200. The container 200 may be used to display an item for sale. The container 200 comprises a first end cap 202, a second end cap 204 (not shown), a central portion 206, and a merchandise card 210. The end caps 204/206 may be molded, for example blow molded, and may have a predetermined cross section. Alternatively, the end caps 202/204 may be formed from a metal or any paper product including cardboard. The cross section of the end caps 202/204 should mirror that of central portion 206, and thus typically will be an oval, a circle, an ellipse, a rectangle or a polygon. The end caps 202/204 may comprise a groove 202B/204B enclosed inside of a lip 202E/204E. The bottom of the top end cap 202 may comprise a generally flat surface 202C that may or may not be parallel with the top surface of the top end cap 202. The generally flat surface 202C may comprise a plurality of

protrusions 202F. As shown in FIG. 5, the protrusions 202 may be spaced apart to allow the merchandise card 210 to be secured therein. The protrusion can be any shape including half circles and wedges. The protrusion may be aligned in a straight line or along a curve to match the merchandise card 210. The protrusion may be on a top end cap having a non-planar surface bottom surface. Likewise, the bottom end cap may be similarly shaped. Alternatively, the top and bottom end caps 202 and 204 may not be similarly shaped. A container may be formed using a combination of ends caps 102/104 and 202/204.

FIGS. 6-9 discloses several different methods for securing the central portion to the end caps. In FIG. 6, a central portion 306 comprises a protrusion 320, for example a barb, disposed near an end 308. An end cap 302 comprises a groove 302B, a first lip 302E and a second lip 302G. The second lip 302G forms an undercut portion 302H. When the central portion 306 is inserted in the groove 302B, the barb 320 extends into undercut portion 302H and the lip 302G helps prevents the central portion 306 from being extracted from the groove 302B. Also, end cap 302 may include a recess, shown in phantom at 350, in which an item to be displayed, e.g. bottle 350, is secured.

In FIG. 7, a central portion 406 comprises an opening 422 disposed near an end 408. An end cap 402 comprises a groove 402B, a lip 402E and a protrusion 424. When the central portion 406 is inserted in the groove 402B, the protrusion 424 extends into the opening 422 in the central portion 406. The protrusion helps prevents the central portion 406 from being extracted from the groove 402B.

In FIG. 8, the end cap 502 is secured to the central portion 506 with a section of adhesive tape 526.